

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** October 17, 2018

**Agenda Item:** 2017-18 Elk Shoulder Season Update

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Informational

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 60 Minutes

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**Background:** Performance-based elk shoulder seasons are firearms seasons that occur between August 15 and February 15, outside the five-week general firearm season. They are intended to reduce over-objective populations by supplementing existing harvest and are not meant to replace or reduce harvest during the general archery and firearm seasons. Shoulder seasons are performance-based with criteria for the number and timing of animals harvested to be met in a three-year evaluation for a shoulder season to continue.

There were shoulder seasons in 43 hunting districts during 2016-17, which was a poor elk hunting year. The fall was very mild and the winter too snowy for hunters to get around in many places. Even so, cow elk harvest in shoulder season HDs was up 33% compared to the previous five years, and 41% of HDs met the harvest criteria in this one-year preliminary analysis. When seasons opened and how long they lasted varied, but among all shoulder season HDs combined 12% of antlerless elk harvest was during the early season (Aug 15 – Oct 16), 53% during the general rifle season, and 35% during late seasons.

In 2017-18, there were shoulder seasons in 44 HDs. Hunting conditions were more normal and cow elk harvest was up 47% compared to the average harvest for the five years before shoulder seasons (2011-2015).

Season length affected the number of elk harvested. In 2016, 60% of 10 HDs with long shoulder seasons that ran until February 15 met their harvest objectives, while only 25% of 12 HDs with short seasons that ran until January 1 did. Hunters took advantage of elk hunting opportunities when they were offered. In 2017, 70% of HDs with long seasons met their harvest objectives, while 42% of HDs with short seasons did. When data from both years are combined, 70% of HDs with long seasons met their objectives while 25% of HDs with short seasons did.

Hunter access to elk remains a problem in getting adequate elk harvest. We know, and have said from the beginning, that shoulder seasons will be successful in reducing elk numbers only if everyone – FWP, landowners and sportsmen – works together. While we have no empirical data yet (we will have that following 2018-19 season), access in many areas such as much of Region 5, home to some of the elk populations most egregiously over objective, is limited.

More information including the shoulder season guidelines, the 2016 shoulder season information page and map, and the 2016 shoulder season performance criteria evaluation table is found in the commission packet.